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# A MUSIC-LOVER OF THE PAST: EUGÈNE DELACROIX

By G. JEAN-AUBRY

*"La musique est la volupté de l'imagination"* (E. D.)

TIME has at last done justice to the passions which have for so long opposed the painter of "Stratonice" to that of the "Massacres de Scio"; even those who to-day are the greatest admirers of Ingres are ready to grant that Delacroix is a master and one of the most noble genii French painting has ever known. If the disputes, once so violent, about two of the greatest painters of the past century were not out of date, they could even now be revived under the pretext, not of their own art, but of the degree in which they were, both of them, devoted to music.

The "violin of Ingres" has so often been mentioned that the expression has remained in the French language to denote a secondary gift, or rather a taste which is, so to speak, adventitious; a taste to which the artist gives free reign during the spare moments left him by his own vocation. That Ingres loved music, and even resorted to it with pleasure, is beyond doubt. But perhaps Delacroix responded still more to music and had as much sympathy and more discernment for it. According to its various forms, he showed a degree of appreciation, judgment, or disdain, the accuracy of which makes one doubt whether he should not be retained in our memory as one of the most engaging portraits of a music-lover of the past.

If we believe the pleasant anecdotes of Doctor Véron<sup>1</sup>, the future painter of "La Justice de Trajan" very nearly embarked, from his early childhood, on a musical career. This is what he reports Eugène Delacroix to have said:

An old organist of Bordeaux Cathedral gave lessons to my sister. While I performed my gambols, this good gentleman, who, besides, was a man of great merit and had been the friend of Mozart, noticed that I accompanied songs with basses and ornaments after my own fashion, the accuracy of which he admired. He even worried my mother to make a musician of me.

<sup>1</sup>Mémoires d'un Bourgeois de Paris.

Delacroix was then five or six years of age. His childish inclinations did not, at that time, show much more consistency than did those of the young Balzac at the same age. But their vocation soon prevailed over their propensities: painting carried away the one as literature absorbed the other. The musical taste of young Delacroix was, nevertheless, already sufficiently developed to induce him to study the piano and the violin. We cannot know how he made use of his talents, for not one of his contemporaries has left us any account regarding them, but we know from his diary<sup>1</sup> that in 1822, when his vocation and his career as painter had already firmly asserted themselves and he had already tasted his first success with "Dante et Virgile," he felt the desire, the need even, of turning to music.

Although the preoccupation of a large canvas to be executed for the "Salon" and the difficulties of a very precarious existence, as it was then, forced him to concentrate all his energies and to devote them exclusively to painting, he at any rate thought of music with longing and regret. On October 12th of the same year (1822), when he was 24, he wrote in his diary: "I wish I could play the piano and the violin again," and a week after that he says that he has taken up the violin once more. In 1824, he still played, but, after that, neither his diary nor his correspondence, nor yet the remarks of those who knew him, ever mention his practice of that instrument again. And the violin of Delacroix is lost in an obscurity never known to the instrument of his great rival.

To tell the truth, Delacroix had too much curiosity and avidity of spirit, too great a need for variety in his knowledge, and too little time, to devote himself to the study of an instrument. Music, it is easy to see, was second only to painting in his constant affection, and it is precisely because he loved it so passionately that he preferred hearing much to playing a little of it.

From the third day of his diary (Sept. 7th, 1822) he speaks of music and of his satisfaction in reading in "Corinne" by Madame de Staël, the passages dealing with Italian music. If her allusion to the meeting of Dante with a singer in his "Purgatory" suggested to Delacroix the idea for a picture, this is not the only reason why this page in "Corinne" attracted him, nor is it to this end that he copied, for his own satisfaction, the following passage which pleased him: "Music is such a fleeting pleasure, one is so conscious

<sup>1</sup>Journal d'Eugène Delacroix, 3 Vols. Paris: Plon, Nourrit & Cie, 1893.

of its flight even while one enjoys it, that the gaiety it provokes is tinged with an impression of melancholy." When, at about the same time, he meets a friend of his childhood, he is particularly pleased because the latter is as fond of music as he is himself.

Even on his travels, at that time of his life, when his chief aim is the study of masters and museums, he does not swerve from his love of music. During his stay in London, in 1825, he went to see an opera with a libretto based on "Faust," "an opera with a mixture of the comic and the blackest tragedy," and he also heard, in two different theatres, the "Freischütz" in a rather more faithful version than the one offered at that time to the Parisian public by Castil-Blaze.<sup>1</sup> He also gives this rather amusing sketch of music in London:<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of Shakespeare's plays, I have seen nothing on their stage that is not a more or less clumsy imitation of what we have in France. I have seen a "Barber of Seville" and a "Marriage of Figaro," which were priceless in their ridiculous way. Their music is atrocious. Even their blind have still less feeling than ours for the instrumental part, whether the violin or clarinet or flageolet. At their theatres no air is sentimental enough to forbid the trumpet to be stuck into it. If John Bull, up in his Paradise, cannot hear them, he thinks that it is not music and that the musicians have gone to sleep.

This taste for and need of music lasted until the end of his life. In 1855, when working at Saint-Sulpice, he is inspired by the church music and the chants, which put him into a "state of exaltation favourable to painting." During the same year he reports that "Chenavard granted me without being asked that nothing can be compared with the emotion caused by music; that it expresses incomparable shades of feeling." Again, in 1857, he says: "How I am enchanted by music. It seems as if the intellect took no part in this pleasure, which makes the pedants class the art of music as inferior."

From the first pages of his diary his two greatest predilections in music are revealed to us:—Rossini and Mozart. More especially Mozart, whose charm and discretion, whose wonderful balance and inexhaustible freshness were to remain, until his last days, his constant admiration] and the object of his indestructible tenderness.

After having heard Rossini's "Tancredi" for the third time, it still gives him pleasure, and when, two years later he returns from a performance of "Moïse," he writes in his diary: "I have

<sup>1</sup>Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 103. Letter to Pierret June 18th, 1825.

<sup>2</sup>*Id. id.*, p. 111.

much enjoyed it. Admirable music. One must go alone to appreciate it. Music is the voluptuousness of imagination; all their tragedies are too cold."

He always preserved for Rossini that admiration which is a mixture of artistic and sentimental instincts. When he hears "Semiramide" much later, in 1853, this delicious music fills him with joy and sweet thoughts on the following day. During the performance he is a little struck by the Italian master's paddings and by his facility which often comes very near the commonplace; but the next day only the finest passages come back to haunt him and to remind him at the same time of the past days of his youth. However, such sentiments never succeed in obscuring his clear judgment of works or of people. He sees very clearly the romanticism in Rossini, in spite of his preference for the music of the previous century, and he very appropriately says: "Only in his music we find these pathetic introductions and those passages which, though often transitory, reveal to the soul a whole situation, without any trace of convention." Delacroix has very well understood that in this, and in his verve and gaiety, in the musical sense, Rossini is inimitable in the way in which he avoids vulgarity; but he knew also that there is nevertheless in Rossini's work something rendered rather decrepit by an abuse of formulæ and embellishment, "a passion for ornaments and exaggerated grace" which will soon make a great number of his works disappointing and tiring for the hearer.

To Mozart he is attached with an affection which nothing can surpass. As a young man he comes back from a performance of "Figaro" "full of divine impressions." He sings the score with some of his friends, and a few days later he buys that of "Don Juan." Twenty years later, when he sees and hears "Don Juan" again, he says: "What a masterpiece of romanticism! and that in 1785. I have been thinking of the dose of imagination the spectator needs to be worthy of such a work." Three days later he once more goes to hear it, and writes the next day:

What admirable blend of elegance and expression, of the comic and the terrible, of tenderness and irony, each in its own nature. *Cuncta fecit in pondere numero et mensura.* In Rossini, the Italian gets the better of him, that is, ornament dominates expression. Many of Mozart's operas are not exempt from this, for he is always adorned and elegant, but his expression of tender sentiments takes a melancholy turn which does not suit every subject equally well. But in "Don Juan" he does not suffer from this drawback. The subject, besides, was admirably chosen because of its variety of characters. Rossini does not vary them so much.

One might perhaps not expect to find in a painter, who has been made, in some ways, with Victor Hugo, the prototype of romanticism,<sup>1</sup> such an inclination for a musical ideal so thoroughly impregnated with the virtues commonly designated as "classical"; but if, not content with admiring the work of Delacroix, one endeavours to trace his own figure and character after his diary and his correspondence, then the impetuous painter, the powerful colourist, the courageous artist who rivals Rubens in the audacity of his compositions, reveals himself less as an unbridled nature than as an ardent spirit who seeks in the most conscientious economy of his forces the means of full expression. Delacroix had not, like Victor Hugo or Chateaubriand, a strong and almost indefatigable physical constitution. This little man with his olive complexion, with his restrained gestures, elegant in his attire of sober neatness, lover of all things beautiful, sceptical with men, repressing continually his emotional propensities, appears as a characteristic instance of a nature that is fundamentally French in its desire for a balance, constantly sought and nearly always maintained, between the promptings of the intellect and the desires of the emotions.

The art of Mozart could not but satisfy him fully. He finds in it not only pleasure and distraction of his thoughts too long concentrated on some great pictorial composition, he finds, even in the early days of his career, when he is not always master of his temperament, an inducement to production, a prop for his thoughts, a help in his art, in short an atmosphere favourable to his ambitions as a painter.

This music often inspires me with great ideas. I feel a great desire to create when I hear it; but what I lack is, I fear, patience.

Mozart always remained for him, in some ways, the standard by which he measured the musical genius, the talent, or the mere ability of others; but—and this is what makes the ideas of Delacroix about music and musicians so noteworthy—his passion for Mozart never made him take up an attitude of hostility or even of indifference towards new works.

It is true that one day he was intensely annoyed with a lady, who at the house of one of his friends, played "infamous modern music," but this passage in his diary can only be considered as a passing moment of bad temper. Delacroix gave, in fact, a willing,

<sup>1</sup>Delacroix is here mentioned with Victor Hugo only in order to recall a current idea, which cannot be subscribed to; there is hardly any real point of contact between these two personalities. Baudelaire, who understood all that he studied, clearly saw this and gave a lucid statement of it in his essay on Delacroix (*cf.* "Art Romantique").

if not uniformly appreciative ear to new works. His instinctive taste led him to prefer the music of the middle of the preceding century, Cimarosa or Mozart, but no stupid obstinacy could be expected from a man who, at the end of his life, at an age at which many artists believe only in one style,—their own,—said that “style consists in the original expression of the personal qualities of each master.”<sup>1</sup>

It is true that after the performance of Meyerbeer’s “Huguenots,” he writes:

Where is Mozart, where is grace, expression, energy, inspiration and science? Where the comic and the terrible? Out of this troublous music there come some surprising effects, but it is a feverish eloquence, flashes followed by chaos.

Did he not see clearly? Who would not agree with him to-day? The distance between Meyerbeer and Mozart is too wide and Delacroix, very rightly, does not think it advisable to compare them with each other. But is there a single composer whom he would think of comparing with the divine Mozart? It might seem doubtful at first. However, in 1847, we find that one of his pupils, who has come to work with him at his studio, discusses Beethoven with him. They draw comparisons between Beethoven and Mozart. Delacroix admits the comparison, and ponders over it. The pupil having said that he finds in Beethoven a “spirit of misanthropy and despair, and especially a portraiture of nature, which is not found in the same degree in others”<sup>2</sup> they agree in comparing him with Shakespeare, and Delacroix even grants that “in spite of the heavenly perfection of Mozart, he does not open up such a horizon to the mind. Should this be because Beethoven has come later?” In the endeavor to define for himself Beethoven’s character, Delacroix goes on to say:

I believe it may be said that he really reflects in a higher degree the modern character of the arts in their expression of melancholy, and that which, rightly or wrongly, is called romanticism.

Was not this a shrewd judgment on the part of an amateur, at a time when many of Beethoven’s works were still very heatedly discussed? But while giving Beethoven his due, he adds, as to the expression of melancholy, that “nevertheless, ‘Don Juan’ is full of that feeling.”

He is unable, it may be seen, to forget Mozart, but his remark is very just. Besides, here no more than elsewhere is he blinded

<sup>1</sup>See his essay, “Variations du Beau,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, July 15th, 1854.

<sup>2</sup>*Journal*, Vol. I, p. 274.

by his feelings. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear him say that he was a little bored by the Symphony in G minor, and to see him, here and there, think more of Cimarosa than of Mozart:

I have my head full of Cimarosa's chords. What a varied supple and elegant genius! He is decidedly more dramatic than Mozart.

Three years later he goes to hear the "Matrimonio segreto" once more, and says: "Such perfection is rarely encountered in human works." Cimarosa seems alone capable to dispute Mozart's place in his affections. A few months before his death, Delacroix says of Anthony Deschamps, whom he had met at a dinner: "He is the only man with whom it is a pleasure to discuss music, because he loves Cimarosa as much as I do." He often goes to the theatre, especially to the Italian opera, which was the taste of the period. He takes pleasure in hearing Zingarelli's "Romeo e Giulietta" and Bellini's "Puritani;" the "Matrimonio segreto" seems to him "more divine than ever," and the downfall appears all the greater when he hears Verdi's "Nabucodonosor." In going frequently to the Italian opera, he lets himself be guided by no exigency of fashion, nor by any worldly obligations, to which he sometimes yields readily enough and which satisfy his taste for the amenities of the world and his discreet dandyism. He does not go merely for the sake of the spectacle, nor, as he did in his early youth, in order to "devour with his eyes their delicious actresses"<sup>1</sup> nor for his delectation over the colours of the scenery, which were dull enough in those days, and by no means like those of his own palette. He really goes for the music, unlike the majority of his contemporaries. He likes music better than the spectacle, and he is well aware that this is no very general taste, for he cannot refrain from noting in his diary: "How rare is a musical nature in the French people."<sup>2</sup> That it is music which he loves is proved by the pleasure he takes in going to the concerts at the Conservatoire, which he visits sometimes twice a week. (April, 1847). He accompanies his friend, Madame de Forget, for whose nature and mind he has a great fondness; but it is not merely a concession to a friend's wishes that prompts him to go. He confesses to having been bored by a Mendelssohn Symphony, with the exception of the *presto*; he took pleasure in Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, but the "Leonore" Overture seemed to him "involved";<sup>3</sup> and the "Credo du Sacre" of Cherubini struck him

<sup>1</sup>Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 86. Letter to Soulier, Sept. 15th, 1821.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, Vol. I, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup>Delacroix does not give the number, but he probably refers to No. 2, to which the epithet "involved" is not unsuited.



as noisy and scarcely touching. Not that he generally dislikes the works of the late director of the Conservatoire, for at the preceding concert he had much enjoyed a fragment from his "Messe de Louis XVI." But as ever, it is once more Mozart who has charmed him with one of his Symphonies:

I was excessively tired and hot, and something happened that I had never experienced before. Not only did this last piece appear to me delightful at every point, but it seemed to me as if my weariness had suddenly been lifted from me. Such perfection, such completeness, and these aerial gradations, all this cannot fail to recreate musicians who possess soul and taste.

Not content with going to the Opera or to the Conservatoire, in order to hear scenic and symphonic works, he also delights in being present at performances of chamber music.

Such performances were not as frequent in the Paris of the period as they have become since, but the atmosphere by which they were surrounded was certainly more in keeping with the works played than it is generally the case to-day. They were given chiefly, or it may even be said almost invariably, in private houses and at the instigation of a small group of enthusiastic music-lovers. A fervent response between the players and the hearers instantly established itself. Delacroix delighted in these gatherings, whether they took place in some drawing-room or in some more or less bohemian studio, like that of a certain Boissard, who was the friend of Gautier and of Baudelaire, and who is mentioned in the preface to "Les Fleurs du Mal." He hears Beethoven's Trios and those of Mozart, which he thinks "more varied, more sublime and more resourceful than ever."

No worldly feeling, nothing of that which has since come to be called "snobism," alloys this great painter's taste for music, and this is simply and touchingly expressed in the following passage of his diary:

The time spent at a concert must never be considered as lost, even if there be only one good piece. There is no better nourishment for the soul. To get ready, to go out, even to interrupt important work in order to go and hear music, only adds to its pleasure, I find; to be in a place in the midst of people whom a community of feeling seems to have united for the enjoyment of a pleasure felt by all; all that, even the boredom occasioned by certain pieces and certain performers, adds, unbeknown to us, to the effect of this splendid thing. If I had had a beautiful symphony played to me at my studio, I should not, perhaps, preserve the same memory of it to this hour. . . . It is a very imperfect pleasure to listen to fine music in a box in the company of people of the world. Only the poor artist in the stalls, sitting alone in a corner, or near a friend who is as

attentive as himself, enjoys to the full the beauties of a work and, consequently, carries away an impression that is free from the admixture of ridicule.

It is clear that neither the dandyism and the elegance of Delacroix, nor his worldly relations succeeded in corrupting his taste. No external considerations or obligations were necessary to encourage his predilection for music. His own nature carried him thither and with him music is not merely a pastime or an amenity, the causes of which escape him or matter little to him. It is for him truly an expression,—and one of those that are dearest to him,—of that Beauty which he himself strives to convey and for the conquest of which he spent his strength and sacrificed his very heart.

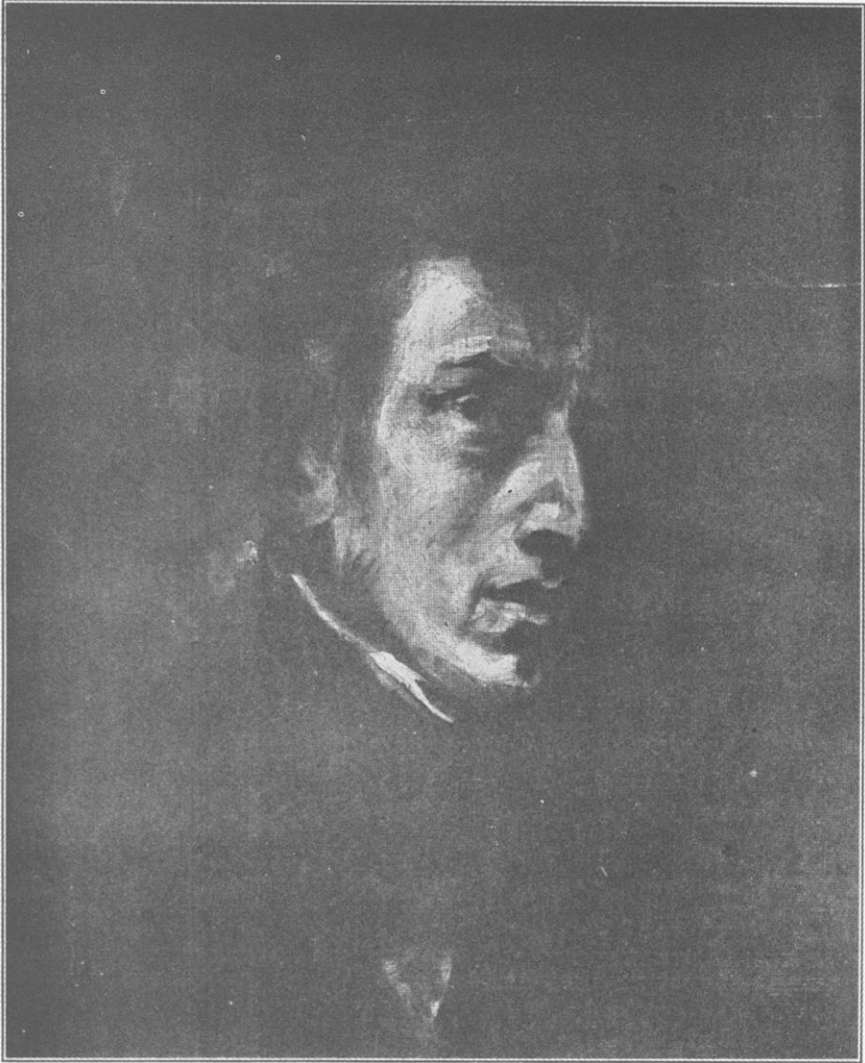
He needed no encouragement, and yet he encountered one of the rarest and most exquisite stimulants he could have wished for in the person of Chopin. When did Delacroix first meet Chopin? It is impossible, to-day, to fix a date with any certainty. Very probably he saw him for the first time with George Sand, for whom he had a friendship tinged with irritation. The first allusion to Chopin to be found in the diary is dated January 28th, 1847, on the occasion of a dinner given by a friend of George Sand, Madame Marliani; but their intercourse must have begun at a considerably earlier date, for it may be seen from the correspondence<sup>1</sup> that, in 1838, Chopin asked Delacroix to harbour in his studio a piano which he did not wish to leave in mercenary hands.

It is for many reasons unfortunate, but particularly so with regard to the relations between Delacroix and Chopin, that the painter did not keep up his diary between his journey to Morocco (May, 1832) and the year 1843, or that at any rate it has not been preserved.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to see what must have attracted Delacroix in Chopin:—that elegance of manner, that distinction and discretion of feeling and of thought, and, behind the appearance of frailty and of a delicate mind, a soul of fire whose expansion is continually curbed. In an environment where everyone, big and small, is smitten by ideas of social reform and political utopia, where Liszt becomes Saint-Simonian for a time, where George Sand is kindled by the lay sermons of *Enfantin*; in this artistic world where an abundance of facility is mistaken for inspiration, and agitation for emotion, Chopin could not but be delighted to meet

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Pierret, Sept. 5th, 1838.

<sup>2</sup>Except two pages for the year 1834, and two pages for 1840.



Portrait of Chopin by Delacroix

a man who was at once ardent and restrained in his judgment, sure of his love for art, and as independent of the clans as of the populace.

A fervent and profound friendship sprang up on both sides between those two men who possessed in the same degree a great discretion of feeling and who both had the virtues of friendship. When, in 1842, Delacroix went for the first time to visit George Sand in the country, at Nohant, it was the presence of Chopin that made for him the truest and most durable attraction.

The place is agreeable,—he writes to his friend Pierret, on June 7th,—and the hosts could not be more amiable to please me. When we are not all gathered at dinner or breakfast, or for a game of billiards or a walk, I remain in my room and read or lounge about on my couch. Now and again there come through the window, which open on to the garden, strains of music from Chopin, who is at work; they blend with the song of the nightingales and the perfume of roses.

“The place is agreeable,” but it may be permitted to doubt whether Delacroix would have remained more than a week,—to such a degree did the ideas of the mistress of the house and of most of her companions displease him,—had not Chopin been there and had they not, both shunning the hollow social dialectics that often ruled supreme in the conversations of Nohant, discussed topics which were equally pleasant to both. A letter written by Delacroix, a fortnight later, to the same friend, throws full light on this point:

I have interminable discussions with Chopin, of whom I am very fond and who is a man of rare distinction. He is one of the truest artists I have ever met.

It was probably during this stay at Nohant, or during the one in 1846, that Delacroix painted a sketch representing Chopin at the piano with George Sand standing behind him. After the misunderstandings that came about between the novelist and the composer, the owner of this sketch had it rather awkwardly cut in two, so as to separate the two heads. Of the sketch as a whole, only a little rough draft is known, but the two portraits have, fortunately, remained. That of Chopin is assuredly one of the most characteristic in the iconography of the great composer.<sup>1</sup> He is here seen under a unique aspect, far from the conventional insipidity from which most portraits of Chopin suffer, whether

<sup>1</sup>*cf.* Moreau-Nelaton, *Delacroix raconté par lui-même*. Vol. II, p. 32. (H. Laurens, Ed., Paris, 1916). The reproductions of the portraits of George Sand and Chopin, and of the little crayon draft are also to be found in that volume: Fig. 241, 242 and 243.

from a fault of the painter's only, or from the effect of those superficial ideas which are, alas, still current with regard to the wonderful composer of the "Preludes" and "Nocturnes," and which have made of him a lymphatic, effeminate figure, the sentimental picture of a keepsake, an Alfred de Musset of music, more distinguished but less spiritual than the other.

The portrait which Delacroix painted of him is unfinished; it is merely an outline. Yet, if he had undertaken to finish it, if he had taken it in hand again, one feels that he would not have changed its character. This is how he saw Chopin. Not that his pictorial romanticism alone is to be held responsible for his rendering; we must remember to what profound melancholy, passionate despair and fiery sentiment the genius of Chopin could attain, and bear in mind that Delacroix must have been better qualified than any other painter to understand the tokens of such a temperament both in the utterances of the man and in the works of the musician.

Delacroix, in fact, is not content with meeting Chopin here and there, at George Sand's or in society. Reserved and time-saving as he is, he goes to see him, and Chopin often comes to his studio for a discourse with the painter.

On May 9th, 1847, Delacroix learns at a dinner given by Madame Marliani, that Chopin has been very seriously ill for some days. Although he is assured of an improvement, the painter goes at once to see him the following day. He cannot be received, but he returns the next morning, again without success. At night, at last, he gains access to the patient, and spends the evening with him. To those who know the nature of Delacroix, such insistence betrays a very real affection, an affection which was to grow ever stronger. Chopin, uncommunicative as he was, and little given to confidences, except in his music and in his rare letters, tells Delacroix of the annoyances he suffered after his rupture with George Sand and of the part he has taken against her with her daughter, Solange, and her son-in-law, Clésinger. In his diary, on January 29th, 1849, Delacroix says:

In the evening I went to see Chopin. I remained with him until ten o'clock. We spoke of Madame Sand, of her queer destiny, and of that mixture of qualities and vices in her.<sup>1</sup>

Chopin's health deteriorates steadily. He has returned more severely ill from his stay in Scotland. Delacroix has no illusions as to his fate; after meeting the pianist Prudent, who imitates

<sup>1</sup>See also the diary for July 20th, 1847.

Chopin's playing, he says: "I was proud for my poor great dying man." We must remember, in order to catch the real tone of this remark, that Delacroix at that time had passed his fiftieth year, and that Chopin was his junior by twelve years.

The painter frequently visits the suffering composer. Chopin still occasionally entertains a few people; friends, charming women, Madame Potocka the "enchantress," the "admirable" Madame Kalerji, but he can no longer go out, except in a carriage. Delacroix sometimes accompanies him, happy, in spite of his often tiring labours, to be able to be of some use to him. The musician, who is already weighed down by illness and melancholy, revives in the presence of Delacroix. The painter no longer cherishes any hopes as to the time that remains for "this man who is so exquisite at heart, and one need not say, in his mind."

Delacroix was not to be with Chopin at the last. He had visited him as late as May 17th, 1849, and had found him better. It was one of those last flashes of a life undermined by consumption. The painter had gone away to spend some time at his little house at Champrosay. Thence he went on to Valmont in Normandy at the beginning of October, to stay with his cousin, and it was only there, on October 20th, 1849, that he heard of the death of Chopin. "A strange thing," he writes in his diary, "in the morning, before getting up, I was struck by this idea. What a loss! How many mean scamps there remain, while this beautiful soul is extinguished!"

Perhaps nobody knew better than Delacroix the extent of the loss music sustained by the death of Chopin. He not only regretted in him an exquisite and delicate friend, with whom he loved to converse; he also had a great admiration for his work. He not only saw in it, like so many others, mere grace and distinction, but he was aware of the powerful and yet measured emotion, the truth and the originality of his expression. When we read in his diary, "Music at Chopin's, he was divine" or, a little earlier, "Little Chopin gave us some music," or, some time after his death, "The Princess Marcellini was kind enough to play to me nothing but Chopin, and it was all admirable," we might feel inclined to think of a somewhat superficial admiration, such as it was felt by many of the Polish master's contemporaries, who did not really grasp the whole extent or strength of his genius. But when, having heard the Princess Marcellini Czartoryska play Chopin, Delacroix writes in his diary:

There is nothing commonplace. The composition is perfect. Could one find anything more complete? He is more like Mozart than anyone

else. Like him, he has those themes that come all alone, that it seems natural to find.<sup>1</sup>

One cannot help feeling that his judgment was in advance of most of the hearers of his time, that he did not stop at the contemplation of the charm of these works, but that, in striving to estimate their architecture and their proportions, he remained, like all of us, spellbound. Can anything more be said of Chopin than the words of Delacroix: "Could one find anything more complete?" To compare Chopin to Mozart is not only admissible; it is, with a lover of Mozart like Delacroix, an avowal that he places Chopin among the greatest. It is more than doubtful that this was generally felt at a period when the more slender frame of these compositions seemed to contend with the greatest difficulty against symphonic and theatrical works.

In his conversations with Chopin, Delacroix endeavoured to gain clearer views, to acquire the technical knowledge that he lacked in musical matters, and to measure his opinions with those of a mind in whom he had full confidence. Thus some of Chopin's opinions have come down to us through the painter's diary, as for instance these:

Experience gave the quartets of Haydn that perfection which we admire in them. Mozart had no need of experience. With him science is always found on the level of inspiration.

Where Beethoven is obscure and seems to lack unity, the cause is not that pretension to a somewhat savage originality with which he has been credited, but the fact that he turns his back on eternal principles: Mozart—never.<sup>2</sup>

If it was in the nature of things that Chopin's remarks should determine many of the musical views held by Delacroix, there is hardly any justification in saying that the painter has been influenced by the composer or has been won over to his opinions. The musical taste of Delacroix was already formed when he first met Chopin and it can be said with greater truth that they happened to agree in a curiously complete manner in their admirations. But Chopin certainly contributed to the extension of the painter's musical knowledge, not only through conversation and teaching, but also by examples, playing to him the works which were then new. "Chopin," says he in his letter of July 19, 1846, to Villot, "has played Beethoven to me divinely; that is worth a good deal of æsthetics."

<sup>1</sup>Journal, Vol. I, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, Vol. I, p. 270 and 365.

He must have often asked Chopin to play Beethoven to him, for he seems to be particularly troubled when confronted with that master's works, and he is one of those who wish to see clear in their own mind. In his judgment and appreciation of Beethoven, he is not only restrained by his love of Mozart, but by his very attachment to the principles of which Mozart is the most perfect exponent. However, he does everything in the world to do impartial justice to Beethoven; he acknowledges unreservedly his greatest qualities and does not disguise in any way the pleasure or even the enthusiasm which some of the works awaken in him, as for instance the "Coriolan" overture; but he equally openly states the reservations which he thinks fit to make in his praise. Numerous as these restrictions are, it is questionable whether Delacroix has not seen clearer in this matter than most of the musicians of to-day, who accept without any kind of discrimination the best and the worst that the composer of the "Pastoral Symphony" has written.

When he says of the "Archduke's Trio":—"there are quite ordinary passages next to sublime beauties;"

When, after hearing "with rapture the divine Symphony in A" he adds:

I have dared to assert that the works of Beethoven are generally too long, in spite of the astonishing variety in his manner of making the same themes reappear. . . . It is evident that the composer often impairs his effect by holding one's attention too long.

When he says, again:

I remember the "Eroica" Symphony more clearly. Beethoven is without a doubt terribly unequal. The first movement is good. The *Andante*, to which I was looking forward, has completely disappointed me. There is nothing more beautiful and sublime than the opening. All of a sudden, you fall a hundred feet into the most extraordinary vulgarity.

And five years later, after having heard this same Symphony again, he says:

I found the first movement admirable. The *Andante* is all that is most tragic and sublime in Beethoven, but only as far as the middle.

And yet again:

The Leonore Overture has made the same confused impression on me. I have come to the conclusion that it is bad; full of sparkling passages, if you like, but without unity.

We are not far, to-day, from sharing his opinions, and the same may be said when we read in his diary the following note:



One must not be too complacent with remarkable geni as to what one is in the habit of calling their negligence, but which should rather be described as their defects. They could do no more than they have done. Often they have spent much labour over very feeble or very shocking passages; this is not infrequently the case with Beethoven, whose manuscripts are as full of erasures as those of Ariosto.

And when, in his notes of the year 1854, we read:

I asked Barbereau if he had completely unravelled the last quartets, and he told me that he still requires a magnifying glass to see everything, and that perhaps the magnifying glass would always be needed. The first violin told me that they are magnificent and that there are always some obscure passages. I boldly stated that what was obscure for everybody and especially for the violinists, had no doubt been obscure in the composer's own mind. However, we cannot judge yet, one must always back up genius.

It may be seen that the attitude taken up by Delacroix is very dignified and of perfect good faith. Less blinded than many others by the incontestable beauties of Beethoven's work, he is the better able to discern its incomplete, disagreeable and jarring features. Although Beethoven died before Delacroix had reached the age of thirty, it may be said that the works of the great symphonist were, as late as 1850, absolute novelties to the majority of music-lovers in France. The different tendencies of the master of Salzburg and the master of Bonn must therefore have clashed much more violently in the minds of the hearers than they do to-day, although, after more than a century, it is still difficult enough to like Beethoven and Mozart *equally*. The partisans of Mozart, as a rule, recognise the qualities of Beethoven, but none of them are ever seen to go to the length of admiring him unreservedly in all his works; and on the other hand, the Beethoven fanatics have often for Mozart but an ill-disguised contempt. Delacroix, even to-day, would still hold a place among the most equitable of Mozart-lovers in his attitude to the works of this composer's great rival. Beethoven troubles him: he is very frequently enthusiastic about him, but there is always a little discontent mixed up with his enthusiasm. He tries to discover the reason for this, he continually compares his impressions, and returns to them again and again.

I have compared the two overtures by Beethoven with the one to the "Magic Flute," for instance, and many others by Mozart. How full the latter are of combinations of all that art and genius can give in perfection; and in the others, what unpolished and odd inspirations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Journal, Vol. I, p. 413. To judge by the context, the overtures referred to are evidently one of the "Leonore" and the "Coriolan."

It is true that his point of comparison is taken at a great height: the overture to the "Magic Flute" is one of Mozart's works to which Delacroix alludes most frequently, and always with the same fervour, to the end of his life. He not only thinks it lovely, but of perfect proportion and, comparing it with more recent works, he wonders whether

with the progress in orchestration, the composers will not be more naturally tempted to prolong their pieces in order to re-introduce orchestral effects which they can vary at every recurrence.

It is clear that this romantic painter has a sense of style and a feeling for construction. He is not content with a musical work that is touching and moving, agreeable or inspired; he demands from it, in addition, perfect proportion in the use of themes and in the presentation of ideas and feeling.

Curiously enough, this painter, who in his art seems to be bent chiefly on dramatic and formidable scenes, enjoys in music the less saddening emotions. He almost reproaches Beethoven with his melancholy:

This man is always sad. Mozart, too, is modern, that is to say he is not afraid of touching the melancholy side of things, but what he needs of points of delicate sadness, he unites with the serenity and easy elegance of a mind who is fortunate enough to see also the agreeable aspects.

It is here, in this last opinion, that we can probably find the quintessence, so to speak, of the musical views of Delacroix. He is a man of his time and of his country. The philosophical preoccupations of music and the extreme seriousness of its expressions, are not to his liking; he cannot get away from the desire to find charm even in the most pathetic passages. But this is not to say that Delacroix's taste is superficial or mannered, or that he wishes for works resembling those which elicited the justly scathing remark from Boileau: "Where everything, even 'I hate you,' is said tenderly." But he does not like music that is shorn of allurements, nor does he care for music that insists and pretends to crush you; he loves what is convincing and captivating. This explains his horror of Meyerbeer, whose gross effects fail to impress him; it explains, also, his aversion for Halévy and his "Jewess," for Verdi and his "Trovatore," and, in a higher sphere, it explains further that he dislikes Gluck, in spite of the efforts of his friend Viardot. He recognises, however,

the grace, the simplicity and the strength of the overture to "Iphigénie en Aulide"; all these qualities move you strongly, but there is a monotony that makes you somewhat sleepy. For a hearer of the 19th

century, after Mozart and Rossini, this smacks a little of plain chant. The double basses pursue you with their cadences like the trumpets in Berlioz.

He does not like the latter composer either, whose music he calls "an overwhelming noise; heroic music gone wrong." In this matter, and also in his attitudes to Mendelssohn, whom he likewise completely condemns, Delacroix may well be reproached with being untractable. But he says without consideration what he likes and what he does not like. His delight in music is grace, delicacy, well-ordered fancy; he has more feeling for the invention of themes and their original variety than for their ingenious development. He likes Haydn, he likes Weber, whom he calls "one of the most worthy successors of Mozart," he likes Mozart and Chopin, Rossini and Bellini.<sup>1</sup> There is a visible link between these varying tastes; all these composers, in spite of their different natures, belong to the same family.

They have for common quality the attraction of that charm which goes from the melancholy smoothness of Bellini to the more acrid sweetness of Chopin, from the youthful freshness of Mozart to the dreamy fantasy of Weber and to the gaiety of Rossini. In all these composers we find, in fact, a grace and sense of proportion which can be detected in the same measure neither in Beethoven, nor in Schubert, nor in Schumann or Wagner. In their works there are other more profound and more powerful qualities, but they have not what Delacroix desires, what he looks for in music, and what he needs. Delacroix is not only a music-lover, he is a French music-lover. He does not say, like Gérard de Nerval in his poem:

*Il est un air pour qui je donnerais  
Tout Rossini, tout Mozart et tout Weber.*

Search as he will, in all the music known to him, he can find nothing save Cimarosa to please him as much as these three masters. It may no doubt seem strange to many musicians of to-day, to class Rossini, as it was done in those days, with Weber and Mozart. The truth is that Rossini's work is scarcely known nowadays. With the exception of the "Barbieri" and the "William Tell" overture in some military band arrangement, what work of Rossini is known to the public of to-day, even to the regular frequenters of the important concerts? In the days of Delacroix,

<sup>1</sup>"I have seen 'Norma' which I expected would bore me; but the opposite happened: this music, which I thought I knew by heart and of which I fancied I was tired, seemed to me delicious." (Journal, Vol. II, p. 293.)

Rossini was in the zenith of his glory and his brilliant gifts certainly were, and are even now, by no means contemptible. Mozart's domain is assuredly vastly more extensive, his inspiration is purer and the variety and distinction of his spirit far superior; but the genius of the composer of "Cenerentola" cannot be denied and the direct simplicity of his accent, when stripped of certain antiquated embellishments, can still delight more than one music-lover. We are probably on the eve of an epoch which will see Rossini in favour again, and musicians will perhaps soon be able to understand that neither Gérard nor Delacroix, nor many others, were so far wrong in being fond of this composer.

Delacroix, in his judgment of music, relied on his ears and on his own taste, which was not only refined, but prudent, and he was not to be guided by the opinions of his friends or by the trends of fashion. He is ever anxious to arrive at a correct estimation of any talent, whether old or new. At a time when Spontini had fallen into disfavour, he declares that, on hearing the "Vestale," he was struck, "through its decay, by a breath of originality which must have been much more apparent at the time of its first appearance" and in spite of the opinions then current, he places Spontini considerably over Cherubini.<sup>1</sup> If it is true that he did not like the music of Berlioz, he was, on the other hand, one of the first to pay homage to the first efforts of Gounod.<sup>2</sup>

However strongly attracted he may be by the quality of charm in music, he is never taken in by it and never accepts it indiscriminately.

Although he always looks for grace, he does not allow himself to be deceived by it. He has no taste for insipid things and dislikes elegies *à la Musset*. He knows that there is nothing like hearing a work frequently in order to find out its weakness and to separate its lasting from its fleeting features. He says, not without melancholy:

The great defect in music is the absence of the unforeseen when once one is used to a piece. The pleasure one finds in the beautiful parts is weakened by this absence of the unforeseen, and one's expectation of the weak and the dull portions, which one knows equally well, can change into a kind of martyrdom the hearing of a piece that may have delighted you the first time, when the negligible passages seemed to slip by and serve almost as link for the composition.

Fastidious and worldly as he is in some respects, fond of refinements and delicacies as he is revealed to us, he never

<sup>1</sup>Delacroix here agrees with Berlioz and Wagner.

<sup>2</sup>Journal, Vol. II, p. 83. Feb. 15th, 1852.

mistakes fashion for beauty. He lives at a time when bad theatrical taste and passion for virtuosi is rife, when italianism, in the good and the bad sense of the term, reigns supreme, in spite of the growing and rather cheap success of Meyerbeer; he loves ease of inspiration and expression, but more especially when such simplicity is accompanied by an original and finished technique, as in Mozart or Chopin. His contemporaries are infatuated with arias full of trills and runs and with shallow instrumental effects, while he notes in his diary:

How much of this music will be able to resist, after a certain number of years, the character of decay which these cadenzas and fiorituri give it, although they have often made the fortune of a work at its appearance?

The older he becomes, the more he reflects on these questions. The conditions of musical beauty are a constant source of meditation for him. He does not only consider the musical personalities whom he has known either through their works or personally, he is not satisfied with merely circumscribing ideas and temperaments; he ponders over the limits of musical expression and over its new possibilities. The works which he hears are for him an opportunity of estimating the capabilities and shortcomings of musical art, and the conditions of enduring or transitory pleasure it can give us. This leads him to write down notes the singularity and the penetration of which are sometimes nothing short of disconcerting, and which seem to foresee more than one of the musical movements of our own time. Does it not seem, for instance, as if he had thought of Wagner's use of the *leit-motiv*, when he writes, in 1854, about Weber's "Preciosa":

I have been thinking of the way in which composers endeavour to establish unity in their works. The return of principal motives is usually what they consider the most efficient means: it is also the one which is most accessible to mediocrity. If such a return is, in certain cases, very satisfactory to the mind and to the ear, it seems to become a secondary resource or rather a pure artifice, when applied too frequently. Is memory such a fleeting thing that it should be necessary, in order to establish a relation between the different parts of a composition, to recall to satiety the principal idea by endless repetitions. . . . These repetitions of the motive seem to me, as I have said, a source of pleasure when they are used occasionally and to good purpose, but they do not so much give the impression of unity as that of fatigue, when unity; does not spring up naturally by the aid of the real resources of which genius holds the secret.

And does not this other passage, written in 1856, seem to presage the Wagnerian conceptions and expressions in "Siegfried" or the "Rhinegold":

Will not the improvement of musical instruments and the invention of new ones, lead to the temptation to go too far in certain imitations? We shall come to materially reproduce the noise of the wind, of the sea, of a water-fall. . . . Everything must be refined, all the senses must be satisfied. It will come to the performing of symphonies while beautiful pictures are shown to complete the impression.

This idea attracts and repels him at the same time, and he seems to have understood the greatness as well as the failings of the stage conception which Wagner was precisely at that time occupied in elaborating, without Delacroix being aware of it. The painter, in spite of his taste for music, or perhaps because of that taste, does not share the enthusiasm of his contemporaries for the operatic form.

Unhappily all the operas are tedious because they keep you too long in a situation which I would call abusive. This spectacle, which keeps the senses and the mind in check, tires one very quickly. One is soon weary of a picture gallery, and all the sooner of an opera which unites in one frame the effects of all the arts together.

Is not this prophetic of the danger which was run as much by Berlioz in "Les Troyens" as by Wagner in the "Ring"? But we must not conclude from this that Delacroix remained solely attached to the older theatrical form of the Mozart operas. Just as the new and daring harmonies of Chopin did not startle him, so does he not consider that the part played by the orchestra should be reduced to those stereotyped accompaniments to which it was mostly restricted before that time. Delacroix has a sure taste, but he also has much curiosity. He possesses, moreover, a fine ear; if he asks of a composer an ordered style and a sense of proportion, he is not content with music that satisfies the mind alone; we can trace in him the appearance of a taste for sonorities for their own sake. On this point he had an encounter with Baudelaire, who admired him so much and with whom he had long conversations about various branches of art. They were both equally passionately attached to letters, plastic art and music. Baudelaire, who was some twenty years his junior, and who looked upon music from a different angle, certainly did not share the painter's views on many musical works. This may be seen, for instance, in their attitude to Wagner. When, in 1855, Delacroix relates in his diary that Madame Kalerji spoke enthusiastically about Wagner, he is annoyed; but it must be said that what displeased him in Wagner was not his music, which he could not have heard yet, but the fact "that he is a democrat and that he writes ridiculous books about the welfare of humanity." On the

other hand, who among the authors or painters of his time, save Baudelaire, could have said what Delacroix wrote in his diary in 1857:

A musical motive played on a single instrument, has only one single way of striking the mind, but the reunion of several instruments, having a different sonority, will give greater force to the sensation.

Sonority that takes the place of ideas is blameworthy, and yet it must be confessed that in certain sonorites there is a pleasure for the senses which is independent of expression.

The musical ideas of Delacroix, it has been seen, are not merely the reflections of a pastime; they come from a man who endeavours to unravel the cause of his satisfactions. They bear witness, on the whole, of a peculiar temperament.

It is somewhat daring, and perhaps vain, to conjecture what the feelings of Delacroix would have been concerning the music of our own time, had he been living at present. Is it not possible, however, to deduce from the opinions with which his diary is strewn, views which one might not have found among the Wagnerians of 1894, but which might have been identical with those that supported Debussy and his art since 1902? In the extent, the manner and the limits of his musical taste, in the reasons for his aversions, he shows the attitude which is traditional with all the French spirits who are fascinated by music. He is never seen to regard music as a system, a philosophy or a religion, however serious-minded he may be and however sincere his affection for that art. Nor does he like it in the lengthy and overflowing forms that are sometimes imposed on us; he seeks and enjoys the delights of music in a simple fashion and shuns its orgies; and when he remembers the words of his governess to the effect that "when one has listened to music for an hour, it is as much as one can carry," he adds:—"She is right, even that is almost too much."

When it is borne in mind that this music-lover was primarily a great painter and that necessarily his thoughts and sensations had to be led, first of all, into pictorial channels, it becomes still more wonderful to find what a considerable space he reserved to music in his mind. At most one might be astonished (but this is merely a side-issue, so to speak) to find that the scenes in which music plays some part are extremely rare in his paintings. It was no longer the time, like in the 18th century, when the guitar, the flute, the *viola da gamba* or the harpsichord were the almost indispensable accessories of portraits or scenes, from the small

Dutch masters to those who, from Fragonard to Watteau, reproduced, in the French manner, the aspects of their period and the fancies of their dreams. As a result of his journey to Morocco, Delacroix exhibited at the "Salon" of 1847 "The Jewish Musicians of Mogador," and in the following year "Arab Comedians and Buffoons." Fifteen years earlier he had painted "Charles Quint at the Monastery of Saint Just," where the imperial friar is seen to let his fingers glide over the keyboard of an organ, while a monk watches the strange dreams in his face. Apart from these pictures, "Orpheus and Heroic Humanity," painted on the cupola of the Library at Luxembourg, might be mentioned. These, with the portrait of Chopin, are the only works that show some connexion with music. But his mind was tied with many firm links to that art, as we have seen. Their large number as well as their quality entitle Delacroix to a place in the front rank among the imaginary assembly, where those who love music unite, round the masters of their choice, the men of the past who showed themselves most worthy of listening to them and of hearing their message.